

Published January 02, 2010 11:00 pm - Science classes have come to life for over 100 sixth-graders at the Mifflinburg Middle School.

Connie Mertz's outdoors feature: Trout class is in session

More than 100 sixth-graders get hands-on lesson

By Connie Mertz

For The Daily Item

Science classes have come to life for more than 100 sixth-graders at the Mifflinburg Middle School.

Since November, they have been the caretakers for 300 brook trout.

Bob Laubach, president of the R. B. Winter Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU), had shared the idea of this unique project with science teacher Joe Southerton.

"It's called Trout in the Classroom," Laubach explained, while students gathered around the small aquarium in their science classroom to observe the tiny fingerlings.

To learn the specifics of the project, both Southerton and Jere Motto, a TU representative, received training last summer. Aside from the in-depth scientific information, funding was necessary.

"Thanks to the efforts of TU and the Mifflinburg Bank & Trust, the money was raised," Southerton said.

"Our focus is to support the community, and students are part of our community," Jeffrey Kapsar, president and CEO of the bank expressed. "When we were told about the project and the financial need, we realized it included environmental education, and we were all for it."

The Trout in the Classroom project began when 400 trout eggs were delivered to Southerton's science classes.

"The first thing they did was separate the dead from the living. That was a life lesson right away," Southerton commented. "There were 300 viable eggs." The students are responsible for all the record keeping, monitoring and feeding of the small fry. And, it is no easy task.

"The first step in feeding is to have clean hands," said student Keisha Schlegel. "Bacteria on your hands could kill the fish."

"We have to be very precise about the pH," Lucas Payson added to which Schlegel added, "We have to put in the exact drops."

Everything is recorded by the group on a chart.

"It's really cool to see how trout live as little fish," Schlegel said responding to her most enjoyable experience thus far.

"The sixth-graders have the opportunity to experience what's involved in this sensitive species," Southerton said as he watched his students complete their tasks. "They know trout have a low tolerance for pollution, and that's why it's essential to have a cold water fishery."

In fact, he brought in well water from his home to be sure there were no contaminants.

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"Chemical testing is done every day to ensure we are doing everything right."

The fry feed off their egg sacs, and students were not to give them food until they swam to the surface.

"There are some finally swimming to the surface," he said, looking into the aquarium. He then opened a book which provided a chart of how much food they were to be given.

"At this stage, they are to get .3 grams two to three times a day. This is based on .3 grams per 200 fry," he added.

"This is all about stewardship of our streams, and this project is a springboard to study other areas of science. We learn about the importance of watersheds and how to keep them healthy. We learn about water chemistry and the importance of math. We are learning life cycles and an appreciation to protect the environment. We can focus on so many things."

Students are well aware that less than a quarter of their brook trout fry will live long enough to be released. It is hoped their trout will be released around Earth Day as 3-inch fingerlings.

"We have selected Buffalo Creek, but we must match our pH with that in the stream. It may have to be changed to Penns Creek," Southerton noted.

It is obvious that the sixth-grade students at Mifflinburg Middle School are abuzz about this project.

"The kids have grabbed it and ran with it," said their proud teacher. "The release date will be an after-school field trip, and I think it will be well attended."

CORRECTION: In the outdoor feature on Greg Molter's bear, the date of the harvest was mistakenly given as Nov. 30. The correct date was Dec. 4.

n Connie Mertz is a hunter and nature enthusiast from Danville. Contact her at: owcam@verizon.net

Photos



Connie Mertz/For The Daily Item Bob Laubach, President of the R. B. Winter Chapter of Trout Unlimited is presented with a check from Jeffrey Kapsar, President and CEO of the Mifflinburg Bank & Trust. and Jere Motto, the TU representative who heads up the Trout in the Classroom project. The aquarium holding about 300 brook trout fry is to the right.



Connie Mertz/For The Daily ItemMr. Joe Southerton, sixth grade science teacher at Mifflinburg Middle School, observes students Keisha Schlegel and Hayley Beck as they do their part in the Trout in the Classroom project.



Connie Mertz/For The Daily ItemJulia McArdle-Coe, Samuel Holman and D'Varon Feliciano, sixth grade students do their role in the Trout in the Classroom project. The project involves 100 students in Mr. Joe Southerton's science classes at the Mifflinburg Middle School.



Connie Mertz/For The Daily ItemSixth graders Jonathan Bergmueller, Lucas Payson, and Keisha Schlegel check the pH from the trout aquarium in Mr. Joe Southerton's science class at Mifflinburg Middle School.